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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1657
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 9749
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0458
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0167
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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000712

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM EC

SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS DEFIANT DESPITE STATE OF EMERGENCY

REF: QUITO 708

Classified By: PolOff Vanessa Schulz for reason 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Palacio declared a state of emergency late on March 21 for four provinces and parts of Pichincha province. Most roads were open on March 22, and the GOE sought to dialogue with protest leaders. CONAIE leaders have vowed to continue their anti-FTA protests. Military insiders deny coup plotting in the military. Presidential advisor Apolo told us the GOE is investigating links between protesters and the government of Venezuela. Meanwhile, flower growers have suspended some operations temporarily in order to protect workers. End Summary.

Indigenous Reject State of Emergency

¶2. (U) President Palacio declared a state of emergency on the evening of March 21 for Imbabura, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, and Canar provinces, and two regions of Pichincha province (Cayambe and Tabacundo). The main purpose is to allow military authorities to move in and re-open blocked roads. Certain civil rights have been suspended under the state of emergency including freedom of speech, inviolability of the home, inviolability of correspondence, right to transit freely within the country, and freedom of association. The Army was asked to transport mayors, prefects, and other strike leaders from the four provinces to Quito by helicopter to engage in dialogue with the government.

¶3. (U) CONAIE leader Luis Macas declared his organization will continue protests and marches despite the state of emergency. Pachakutik deputy for Cotopaxi province and indigenous leader Jorge Guaman told PolOff on March 22 that the state of emergency did not change much. He said indigenous leaders were willing to meet with the GOE, but had received no invitation to do so. CONAIE leader and ECUARUNARI VP Raul Ilaquiche told PolOff on March 22 that CONAIE had brought 6,000 indigenous to the capital. (RSO confirmed only 1,000.) Ilaquiche said indigenous would march in Quito on March 23, accompanied by members of Quito anti-FTA social groups and student groups. As of the 16H00 on March 22, roads were clear in Cotopaxi province, but remained blocked in Imbabura province. One road in Chimborazo province remained blocked, but the Pan American Highway was open. Roadblocks were removed near Cayambe, yet indigenous were expected to reblock the roads. Campesinos in Los Rios province also reportedly blocked roads in solidarity.

¶4. (U) In Quito, up to 1,000 CONAIE protesters were expected to march again to the Congress and Presidential Place on

March 22. Civil society groups, health workers, electrical workers, and students of the MPD Party-affiliated radical FEUE were also expected to march and protest in the capital.

Source Says Military Coup Unlikely

¶ 15. (C) Retired Colonel and military insider Luis Hernandez told PolOff on March 21 he did not believe a coup attempt from within the Ecuadorian military was imminent. Instead, Hernandez believes that CONAIE, plagued by internal divisions, hoped to rally its membership behind the FTA and Oxy, issues which are convenient targets of opportunity. He believes the protests are a tactic to show CONAIE strength in the run-up to the Presidential elections. Hernandez said that CONAIE would need the support of the military to overthrow the Palacio government, which he believed was lacking. Hernandez also suggested that CONAIE leader Macas might hope to run as Rafael Correa's vice presidential candidate. Hernandez himself had joined street protests which led to ex-President Gutierrez' ouster in April; he currently supports the presidential candidacy of Leon Roldos.

GOE On Venezuela Connection

¶ 16. (C) On March 21, Presidential adviser Jose Modesto Apolo told us the GOE had a growing body of circumstantial evidence of Venezuelan influence in Ecuadorian affairs. He also claimed one of three Basque protest supporters associated with a suspect NGO was a priest who had also visited Venezuela recently. He said they knew that 40 indigenous protest leaders had visited Venezuela in the past few months.
Flower Industry Suffering

¶ 17. (U) Flower industry representatives requested protection against growing lawlessness outside of Quito from the Ministry of Defense. There are reports that some flower company employee owners and employees are being threatened by striking protesters. Several flower growers have shut down temporarily in order to avoid the risk of harm to their workers. A GOE spokesman estimated financial losses due to the strike at \$100 million.

Comment

¶ 18. (C) With roads now mostly re-opened, commerce is flowing. However, open roads also make it easier for protesters to congregate in the capital. Thus far, indigenous presence in Quito has been small, but growing. Ilaquiche's estimate of 6,000 is likely an exaggeration, though protester numbers could swell with the inclusion of other social and student groups.

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